

WANDERERS' REVIVAL IS COMPLETE!

THE Wycombe Wanderers revival is complete. Having won their last eight matches on the trot, the Blues visited Ilford on Saturday — a side that had beaten them 3-0 at Newbury Park this season. And with two truly superb goals by Howard Kennedy and Steve Perrin, they overcame this stiff challenge to run out deserved winners.

Since losing 2-3 at Kingsnorth, Wycombe have gone from strength to strength — a revival that has taken them racing into second place. As Enfield won 2-0 at Tooting, they still head the table by 3 points but Wycombe are now nine clear of third placed Dagenham in Division One of the Highways Isthmian League and are nicely placed for the run-in to the season.

The game at Ilford on Saturday was really going to be the test for Wanderers. They had beaten — and beaten well — eight mediocre sides before this match but the Essex club were bound to gauge just how well Wycombe are playing at the moment. They had already taken a point from the first league meeting when they drew 3-3 at Loakes Park and then a few weeks later they inflicted Wanderers' heaviest defeat for some time when they bundled them out of the F.A. Challenge Trophy to the tune of 3-0.

Both sides had made changes since then. For Wycombe, John Maskell and Tony Horseman were back while Ilford were missing top goalscorer John Butterfield, skipper Roger Day, and another forward, Tony Turley. Maskell's inclusion made the biggest difference. His stand-in, Brian Stevenon, had made two errors that gave away goals in Wanderers' previous game at Newbury Park and the whole defence seemed shaky on that day. This time, Maskell gave them all the confidence they needed.

Wanderers built on that confidence throughout the 90 minutes. Ilford, struggling recently having dropped five points from their last two league matches, could not match the skills of the visiting players especially in midfield where there was water lying on the pitch after the morning's rain. The surface went from bad to worse and it was a credit to both teams that they produced some excellent football in almost impossible conditions. But it was Wycombe who looked the more dangerous, created the more chances and looked the safest and their three points were richly deserved.

In the fifth minute Wycombe suffered a major setback when Paul Birdseye and Ray Eaton both made contact with a 50-50 ball. Both players swung at full tilt and Birdseye came off worse. After treatment, Paul broke down again, played on for a further few minutes but eventually had to be replaced by substitute Dave Alexander. It was later revealed that Birdseye had strained his knee. His replacement, Alexander, fitted into the full back's role as if he had played there all his life. Dave's extra mobility served him well in tight spots.

When Bowhill cleared Perrin's eighth minute header off the line, it looked as though Wanderers were going to suffer a repeat of the Trophy game here in November. They were making all the running but the chances were being forsaken.

By **STUART EARP**

Ilford 0, Wycombe Wanderers 2

Perrin drove into the side-netting with 14 minutes gone but Ilford, with John Still playing a fine game at centre back, managed to hold out.

Still is not the most popular player amongst Wycombe fans who remember him for his back passes at Loakes Park this season, but he held Ilford together more than once in this game. After that early onslaught, in fact, Ilford came back well and it took a great save from Maskell to keep them alive in the 21st minute. Steve Barratt crossed from the left and Tony Bass controlled before turning to shoot from six yards. Maskell spotted the danger and raced out to smother the shot.

With neither side allowing each other any time or space, play became ragged in midfield where challenges often became heated as the mud took players through tackles, and clashes became more frequent.

Ray Eaton went into the book

when he brought down Perrin on half way. Steve was galloping through and would have had a clear route to goal. A minute later, Wycombe scored the first goal at a highly critical time.

Just one minute before the break, Searle controlled a pass from midfield on the left. He slipped the ball inside to Mick Hollifield who sliced an intended shot towards Kennedy. He swung first time and sent the ball racing like a bullet past the startled Williams and into the roof of the net. It was Howard's third goal in three games, and it crowned an excellent performance.

There was a hectic opening to the second half when Maskell was called into action early on and at the other end Still's fine tackle robbed Searle of a great chance. Then after Ray Carvell had replaced the injured Tony Gibson, Searle almost turned Kennedy's cross home at the near post.

Ilford hit back when Jimmy Wilsonham's corner flew right across the face of the visitors' net without getting a touch but as Ilford pushed forward for an equaliser they began to leave gaps in defence. Fortunately for them, Peter Deadman was on top form as usual and his interceptions often halted dangerous Wycombe raids.

Deadman got into the act upfront in the 76th minute when he turned well to send a shot against the base of the upright from Wilsonham's corner but two minutes later Wycombe had another chance to make it 2-0 when Searle flicked on Keith Mead's free kick to Hollifield who screwed his shot wide of the post.

Wycombe's second goal came four minutes from time. Eaton tried to find Williams with a back pass which hit a patch of water and came to a halt. Horseman got there just before Williams and touched the ball

on to Perrin at the angle of the penalty area. Knowing Williams was off his line, Perrin managed to lift and curl the heavy ball into the net from a distance of over 20 yards for a remarkable goal. Deadman raced back in a vain attempt to clear off the line but Perrin's shot was inch perfect.

That was the end for Ilford. The time added on by referee Maher only created two more chances for Wycombe which Searle and Hollifield missed and Ilford could muster nothing in reply. Wycombe's loyal fans, who dwarfed Ilford supporters, were chanting "We're going to win the league" at the close of this match and if Wanderers continue this excellent form at the moment, those followers could well be right.

ILFORD: A. Williams, D. Bowhill, P. Deadman, J. Still, R. Eaton, M. Bennett, A. Gibson (sub R. Carvall 52 mins), S. Barratt, J. Wilsonham, A. Bass, P. Scott.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye (sub D. Alexander 29 mins), K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Hand, H. Kennedy, J. Reardon, M. Hollifield, A. Horseman, J. Searle, S. Perrin.

Referee: T. Meher (Hull/Slip).

Half-times: 0-1. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe: Kennedy (44), Perrin (56).